Summer Externships
Frequently Asked Questions

(The information below applies to the Summer Externship course. There are separate FAQ’s for Externships in the regular academic year and the Atlanta Externship Program.)

What is Summer Externship?

Summer Externship is designed to offer students practical work experience while providing faculty supervision and guided reflection during the summer break. Students work in a law office or similar setting (what we call “fieldwork”). In addition, the course work includes assigned readings, weekly submission of reflective journals, and online class discussion, all of which are designed to help you learn from your fieldwork experience.

What kinds of placements are available?

There is a wide variety of placements available. The work must be for a governmental agency, in house counsel, non-profit employer, or for a private law firm if your work is limited to that firm’s governmental or non-profit clients (for example, working with a private law firm on its representation of a school board, its pro bono clients, or court-appointed criminal cases). Our rules, consistent with most law schools, do not allow us to give class credit if you work for paying clients for private law firms or receive a paycheck from a government agency.

Because the “classroom” work in the course is all done online, there is no geographical limitation on field placements. So long as the placement meets our other requirements, it may be anywhere in the United States. In addition, we have occasionally approved placements outside the United States.

How do I get placed with an extern supervisor?

You must secure your own field placement. You will not be allowed to register for the course until you have secured a field placement for the summer term. If you do not yet have a placement secured, but are interested in doing so, we will work with you during the weeks preceding the start of the summer term to line up a placement, based upon your preferences and available placements. However, we cannot guarantee you a place in the Summer Externship course until you have secured an acceptable placement for the summer. You should begin applying for summer externships early in the spring semester. Many students find placements through the Public Sector Career Fair and other Career Services Resources.

Before you can register for the course, you must submit an application. The application is quite short. When your application has been approved by the externship faculty members, the Registrar’s Office will allow you to register for the class. You can submit the application online at, https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/mercersummerexternshipapplication.
How much do I work at my placement site and what does that mean for the rest of my schedule?

You can take Summer Externship for either 2 or 3 hours credit. To receive 2 hours of credit, you must complete fieldwork of at least 120 hours; for 3 hours, you must work at least 180 hours. You will arrange a regular work schedule with your field supervisor. 

So long as the schedule works for you and your supervisor, you may work full time or part time. Your start date and end date are also up to you and your supervisor; although you should note that regardless of when you begin your fieldwork, the online discussion component of the course will be begin during the last week of May. You also have until the middle of July to complete all fieldwork hours.

Is Externship valuable only for students who want to work in public service fields?

No. The Externship course allows you to work with lawyers and to experience what it is like to work as a lawyer. You will build skills that are transferable to all kinds of legal work. Many students who have taken the course in the past have gone into practice areas quite different from the offices in which they were placed. Yet, they consistently report that the placement was valuable for them. Some students use the experience to try out fields they might be interested in for their careers; others use it to experience something different from what they will be doing after they graduate.

Why should I take the Externship course?

- It is a great learning experience, letting you apply the knowledge you have learned in law school to actual practice settings.
- It gives you practice at being a professional within a support structure of both a fieldwork supervisor and a faculty member.
- It is a great way to try out a field that you may or may not want to work in later. You learn about your own placement and also about those of your classmates, through online discussion.
- It creates networking opportunities. Some students have secured temporary or permanent jobs at either their placement sites or through contacts developed during the placement.
- It enhances your resume, giving you a list of specific skills and experiences that you have gained through the fieldwork.
- It also demonstrates initiative and that you are eager to supplement your classroom learning with legal work. Prospective employers are impressed to see Externship on your resume.

What do I do if I want more information?

Contact Professor Tim Floyd, at floyd_tw@law.mercer.edu, or Professor Sarah Gerwig-Moore, at gerwig-moore_s@law.mercer.edu, who will be glad to answer your questions.